

Office of the
State Department
of Education

**Public
School Information**

**2008
Legislative
Report**

Idaho Rural Education Task Force

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Idaho Rural Education Task Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fiscal Year 2008 public schools budget included \$100,000 for the research and development of the Rural Education Initiative with the intent of developing the Idaho Rural Education Task force. The task force is comprised of key stakeholders from around the state who share in the desire to improve Idaho's rural schools. The task force began meeting in July 2007 with the goal of proposing and examining solutions to challenges facing rural schools. The task force's work this year has focused on three areas: recruitment and retention of Highly Qualified Teachers, funding shortages related to insurance costs and staff allowances, and the technology gap between rural and urban schools.

Rural districts are especially challenged to find enough teachers to meet their needs, and often the qualified applicant pool for open positions is very small or non-existent. The situation is rapidly becoming more critical due to the increased math and science graduation standards recently adopted by the State of Idaho, which elevates the need for teachers. To help meet the rising demands, the task force is looking at a strategy to help motivate high school students and instill passion for teaching at an early age to increase the number of people entering the teaching profession. To assist districts in retaining teachers and to maximize the use of the current teacher population, the committee made recommendations regarding incentives for teachers who earn qualifications to teach in multiple subject areas and teachers who take on extra leadership duties. Superintendent Luna included these recommendations as part of the Idaho State Teacher Advancement and Recognition System, or ISTARS.

While teachers' salaries are often cited as the number one issue in recruitment and retention of Highly Qualified Teachers, insurance and benefits are also key components of teacher compensation. As insurance premiums increase, cash-strapped districts are forced to divert limited discretionary dollars to cover the rising insurance costs of employees which should be used to enhance educational opportunities for students. In response, the Rural Education Task force recommends the establishment of a separate line item in the Public Schools budget, beginning in Fiscal Year 2010, dedicated to listing insurance costs and benefits.

While many of Idaho's districts would be considered remote and isolated rather than simply rural, technology and the Internet offer students and teachers access to the world beyond. The task force focused on two elements of technology: connectivity and technology support. Rural schools need adequate Internet access to meet the increasing demands of education and society and substantially increase the potential solutions in many areas of education, such as online remediation and distance learning for teachers and students. The task force is looking at making recommendations for potential collaboration with utilities, private industry and higher education to assist districts in achieving adequate connectivity. The task force recognizes that the ability to maintain that technology is of equal importance and, therefore, will look to establish funding for a position (or partial position) per school district for technology support.

Key Findings:

1. Idaho and the United States in general lack a common definition of a “rural school” that could be utilized to assist in identifying schools for additional funding, grants, services and for the development of policies that would have a positive impact on Idaho’s rural schools.
2. K-12 education needs to build stronger partnerships with higher education in recruiting people into the teaching profession and developing teacher candidates who are highly effective and prepared to meet the challenges of the classroom right out of college.
3. Currently, the supply of certificated teachers in the State of Idaho does not meet the demand. In discussions with the Deans from the Colleges of Education, the number of students entering the teaching profession is down, and the number of graduates choosing to teach in neighboring states is on the rise as Idaho struggles to match the level of pay offered by other states.
4. In addition to shortages of certificated staff, rural schools struggle to fill their classified staff positions due to low salary ranges established by the current funding formula.
5. Every year, more schools in Idaho opt to move to a four-day school week each year. Many of these districts are making this decision due to financial strain. However, current research is not readily available to help districts make an informed decision as to whether or not a four-day school week would be beneficial for their district in saving money or increasing student achievement.
6. Idaho’s rural schools have a favorable student-computer ratio compared to that of their urban peers, in large part thanks to the JA and Kathryn Albertson Foundation and the contributions it made to technology in Idaho’s schools¹. While this financial support was responsible for supplying schools with much of the hardware and technology they have today, those funds were a one-time contribution, and this equipment is now aging. Idaho’s rural schools lack the means to hire adequate and qualified technology support staff to maintain and keep this equipment and connectivity up-to-date and operational.
7. Access to high-quality professional development is very limited and difficult to come by for teachers in rural school districts due to a variety of factors, including: distance from colleges and universities, lack of connectivity to access online professional development and courses not being offered at convenient times for teachers.
8. Utah has established the Utah Education Network, which “is a consortium of public education partners, including the Utah System of Higher Education and its ten universities and colleges and Utah Electronic College; the Utah State Office of Education, local school districts and the Utah Electronic High School; and the state’s Library system².” The network connects all partners with high-speed Internet

¹ Idaho Council for Technology in Learning (ICTL) Report

² (2008). Utah Education Network. <www.uen.org> (2008, January 11).

connectivity linking teachers and students alike to a variety of resources and educational opportunities. A similar network could be utilized in Idaho to bring high-speed Internet connectivity and resources to Idaho's rural schools.

Background:

What does it mean to be a rural school? According to a majority of sources, "rural school" is a definition that lacks clarity and consistency across the United States. While the definition is speculative, it is safe to say that the average Idaho citizen could easily discern between Idaho's rural and urban schools based on the community in which it resides.

According to *Profile of Rural Idaho: A look at economic and social trends affecting rural Idaho*³, 35 of Idaho's 44 counties are classified as rural because the largest town or city has less than 20,000 residents. Of Idaho's 699 schools, 362 of them reside in Idaho's nine urban counties leaving approximately half of Idaho's schools as rural schools. While this number is accurate in relation to the population of counties, it is incorrect when you consider the large number of rural schools that reside in otherwise urban counties. Despite this rough estimate, it is apparent that a large number of Idaho's schools can be classified as rural by any definition. While the definition of a rural school is debatable, one thing that is consistent is that the State of Idaho has a duty to provide an equitable and consistent level of education to all of Idaho's students regardless of where they attend school.

Following the 2007 Legislative Session and the appropriation of \$100,000 to fund a Rural Education Task force, (See Addendum A: 2007 Idaho Public Schools Budget Intent Language) Superintendent Luna charged his department with the goal of proposing and examining solutions to issues facing rural schools in an effort to improve and enhance the state of rural education in Idaho. As a former member of the U.S. Department of Education working with rural education, Superintendent Luna recognized the unique characteristics and needs of rural schools and the importance that the state plays in ensuring that all students, regardless of their schools' location, deserve an opportunity to have the same resources and opportunities available to them as to that of their urban peers.

In response to Superintendent Luna's challenge, the Idaho State Department of Education created the Idaho Rural Education Task force comprised of key stakeholders from around the state including: superintendents, principals, school board trustees, teachers, counselors, legislators, parents, business representatives and representatives from the State Department of Education (See Addendum B: Rural Education Task force Members). While representing many different interests, all of these stakeholders shared a common goal: To improve the state of Idaho's rural schools.

The following report highlights the first year of work completed by the Idaho Rural Education Task Force, including an overview of the task force's goals and desired outcomes, our progress to date, important findings, recommendations and a request for continued appropriation into Fiscal Year 2009.

³ Salant, Priscilla, Alan Porter. Profile of Rural Idaho. Idaho Commerce & Labor Division of Commerce,

OVERVIEW

Goals:

- Propose and examine solutions to issues facing rural schools.
- Prepare report for State Superintendent, State Board of Education and State Legislature.

Desired Outcomes:

- Increase the number of highly qualified teachers in rural districts through recruitment and professional development.
- Improve the retention of highly qualified teachers in rural districts.
- Close the technology gap between rural and urban schools.
- Establish a way for rural districts to improve their facilities.
- Increase opportunities for accelerated learning in rural districts.
- Provide rural districts with assistance in addressing the unforeseen needs of severely disabled children.
- Provide rural districts with remedies for declining enrollment.
- Provide possible solutions to increased insurance costs faced by all schools.

The task force will accomplish the following:

1. Research educational trends including states/districts that have addressed the issues that rural schools face through innovation.
2. Review policies and procedures that affect rural schools.
3. Analyze solutions that can be achieved without additional appropriations.
4. Create a list of policies, procedures and laws that need adopted and/or changed at the district and state level to benefit rural schools:
 - a. Internally within the State Department of Education.
 - b. Board rule under the State Board of Education
 - c. State laws through the State Legislature.
5. Establish a timeline for action.
6. Prepare a report for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board and the Idaho Legislature.

Progress:

The Rural Education Task force met five times in person and twice via conference call and Web from July 1, 2007 through January 11, 2008. The financial resources allocated to the State Department of Education for the Rural Education Initiative were primarily utilized for committee members' travel and associated costs. Other expenditures related to meeting costs, administrative costs and support staff for the Rural Education Initiative. Other anticipated costs will be used for further research regarding recommendations and the implementation of a committee recommendation. Of the original \$100,000 allocated, a balance of \$76,371.20 remains as of January 7, 2008. By June 2008, we anticipate a balance of \$46,000.

During the course of these meetings, the committee explored and evaluated solutions to the three keys areas of rural education: recruitment and retention of Highly Qualified Teachers, funding

shortages related to insurance costs and staff allowances and the technology gap between rural and urban schools. While the committee took an in-depth look at these three areas, they also identified several other key issues for further analysis, which they did not have time to adequately explore but could in the coming year. These issues include transportation costs, Federal requirements and the individual needs of special needs students, and aging and deteriorating school facilities (See Addendum C: Rural Education Issues and Solutions Chart).

Recommendations:

While the Rural Education Task force considers their work to be in its infancy with a considerable amount of research and analysis left to take place, the members of the task force have recommended the following actions to the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Idaho Legislature:

1. The Rural Education Task force recommends that the 2008 Legislature support and approve Superintendent Luna's ISTARS Teacher Compensation Plan, which encompasses four of the committee's recommendations for improving the recruitment and retention of Highly Qualified Teachers (See Addendum C: Rural Education Issues and Solutions Chart).
2. The Rural Education Task force requests continued appropriation of the original \$100,000 into Fiscal Year 2009 to continue its work in order to bring a thorough and detailed set of recommendations to the 2009 Legislature.
3. The Rural Education Task force recommends that the 2008 Legislature support and approve Governor Otter and Superintendent Luna's recommendation to increase the base pay for classified staff.
4. The Rural Education Task force recommends the Legislature establish a separate line item in the Public Schools budget dedicated to insurance costs and benefits.
5. Fund a position (or partial position) per school district for technology support based on student enrollment benchmarks to be established by the Rural Education Task force.

ADDENDUM A

SENATE BILL NO. 1236 – Approp, Public Schools, Operations

39 SECTION 7. Of the moneys appropriated in Section 3 of this act, up to
40 \$100,000 may be expended by the Superintendent of Public Instruction to con-
41 duct a study and develop plans that address the challenges of rural schools
42 including, but not limited to, the issues of declining enrollment,
43 inefficiencies in administration and service delivery, and recruitment of
44 qualified teachers.

ADDENDUM B

RURAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE TASK FORCE

State Senator	Senator Steve Bair	Blackfoot
State Representative	Representative Bert Brackett	Rogerson
Executive Director Idaho Rural Partnership	Dale Dixon	Boise
PTA	Deidre Erwin	Bruneau
Executive Director Idaho Digital Learning Academy	Dr. Donna Vakili	IDLA
Idaho Rural Schools Assn	Harold Ott	Lapwai/Troy
State Representative	Representative Ken Roberts	Donnelly
State Representative	Representative Mary Lou Shepherd	Wallace
Business	John Wright	Wendell
School Counselor	Robert Benfit	Wallace
Vice Chair School Board Trustee and VP of Idaho School Board Association	Wayne Freedman	Council
Vice Chair School Board Trustee	Kelli Hurst	Clark Co.
Superintendent	Sandra Pommerening	Kellogg
Superintendent	David Neumann	Genesee
Superintendent	Tim Rosandick	Homedale
Elem/MS Teacher	Wanda Valeska	Prairie School
Curriculum Director	Melissa Waddoups	West Side
Principal/Superintendent	Mel Wiseman	Shoshone
Regional Special Education Consultant	Rich Henderson	SDE
Division of School Support Services	Nick Smith	SDE

ADDENDUM C

Rural Education Task Force Issues and Solutions Chart

This chart lists the issues and possible solutions discussed by the Rural Education Task Force and is intended as a working document for task force use. It is included in this report to highlight the scope of work performed by the task force and not as a report of final recommendations. This is a document that will continue to expand as the task force develops a thorough and complete set of recommendations for the 2009 Legislature.

Problem	Recruitment and Retention of Highly Qualified Teachers in rural areas.
Justification	<p>The math and science graduation standards are increasing which requires more math and science classes; in turn districts will need to hire additional teachers.</p> <p>All teaching positions in rural districts are at times hard to fill due to a variety of social, financial and geographic factors.</p>
Potential Solutions Discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Use student teaching as a recruitment tool. (2) Task force recognizes a need for an online teacher recruitment program and employment website such as Teachers-Teachers.com (program that was presented at the 9/25 meeting) that can help Idaho recruit highly qualified teachers from other States. (3) Loosen certification requirements within the parameters of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) to give local districts the control to hire community members who are experts within a content area whom they deem as highly effective in the classroom. (4) Incentives for teachers who will teach in hard-to-fill positions (as defined by individual districts) such as math, science and special education. [This is addressed in ISTARS] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (4a) Increase the percentage of positions that qualify as hard-to-fill for rural districts in ISTARS. (5) If a district stays within its allotment of Full Time Equivalency (FTE) allow them to report more than one FTE for a teacher who teaches additional classes. (6) Recruit high school students into teaching earlier using the Growing Idaho's Future Teachers (GIFT) curriculum developed by Nancy Larsen through IDLA. This could help motivate students into teaching and instill a passion for it early on.
Potential	(1) Students at some Idaho universities and or colleges wishing to

Obstacles	<p>student teach in a rural area are charged an additional fee to student teach in districts located away from the town in which the college or university resides.</p> <p>(1a) Incentives for students who are willing or would like to student teach in rural districts.</p> <p>(3) Need to create an expedited path to certification (currently an emergency interim certificate is only good for one year and the alternate path to certification takes three years). Concerns were raised about expediting the process and still ensuring the individual would be adequately prepared in pedagogy.</p>
Cost	(6) Approximately \$5,000 to get the IDLA curriculum up and running.
Timeline	

Problem	Filling all of the necessary endorsements and course offerings in a rural school.
Justification	Rural schools often need teachers to teach in multiple subject areas and different grade levels within the same subject area. Therefore, teachers in a rural school are uniquely burdened with multiple subjects. When one of the teachers leaves the school, it makes it difficult to fill that position if the teacher had been teaching in multiple subject areas.
Potential Solution	<p>(1) Incentives for teachers with multiple endorsements in core subject areas that are being utilized by the district. [This is addressed in ISTARS]</p> <p>(1a) Enhance the pay further for teachers <i>teaching</i> in the multiple endorsements.</p> <p>(2) Incentives for those teachers who take on extra duties. [This is addressed in ISTARS]</p> <p>(3) Incentives for teachers who teach dual credit and Advanced Placement courses.</p> <p>(4) Utilizing an IDLA preplanned curriculum with a teaching assistant or paraprofessional when a teacher cannot be found to meet the needs of a school.</p>
Potential Obstacles	
Cost	
Timeline	

Problem	Rising insurance costs
Justification	Each year, insurance costs increase forcing districts to utilize a larger percentage of their discretionary dollars to cover the increase leaving fewer dollars for other discretionary expenses.
Potential Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Create a separate line item for insurance costs, separating it from the discretionary money. [This move would assist districts and the State Department of Education in analyzing and illustrating the costs of insurance and free up money for other critical education expenses.] (2) Establish a consortium of districts for insurance. [The Idaho School District Council] (3) Give districts the option of moving under the state insurance program.
Potential Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Insurance costs vary greatly among districts. Calculations could be made based on what the state provides for state employees. (1) Currently insurance benefits are negotiated at the local level as a part of teaching contracts. (1) Districts may be tempted to cut benefits to match line item. (3) This is not currently feasible but could be a future solution.
Cost	
Timeline	

Problem	Connectivity
Justification	<p>Testing is an area that requires significant technology and staff resources that are currently unmet with the current support staff multiplier.</p> <p>Many educational and vocational classes are using a greater amount of technology within the curriculum. In order to adequately prepare students for college and the future workforce, more technology and increased Internet access needs to be put into the classroom.</p> <p>Many of the potential professional development opportunities for teachers in rural districts require an adequate updated computer and a high level of connectivity.</p>

	<p>Need to provide access for distance learning opportunities for students and staff. Some districts rely heavily on technology for alternative education and remediation.</p> <p>The base line goal for Internet connectivity should be T1 for every district.</p>
Potential Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Use a Utah model to connect all Idaho schools and universities for a statewide Idaho Education Network. (2) Work with other agencies, utility companies, and the Idaho Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to get rural schools adequate Internet access. (3) Incentivize private industry to allow rural school districts to tap into their corporate network source.
Potential Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Cost (2 & 3) Currently no incentives (takes time to develop and go through the Legislative process) – collaborate with private industry and utilities.
Cost	
Timeline	

Problem	Current allotment and reimbursement for classified staff is inadequate
Justification	<p>Over the years, the formula for classified staff has not been reevaluated, while the need for more staff has increased. In addition, the range of staff that falls under this category has diversified since the development of the formula. The allotment covers custodial, maintenance and cafeteria staff as well as professional staff, including technology support staff and business managers.</p> <p>The increased use of technology in education has resulted in a need for qualified Information Technology (IT) Support Staff to develop and maintain a district's technology infrastructure.</p>
Potential Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Change the divisor in Idaho Code used to allocate classified staff to a district to recognize that rural districts have a need for a diverse number of classified staff for a smaller number of students. (2) Increase the staff allowance for classified staff. (3) Increase the base salary for classified staff. (4) Change the definition of classified staff in Idaho Code to recognize the broad range of positions that qualify as classified staff.

	(5) Fund one position per school district for technology support based on benchmarks to be established by the Rural Education Task Force.
Potential Obstacles	<p>(5) A scope of work would need to be created to communicate the expectations for the technology position.</p> <p>(5) Funding for the FTE. This could be its own line item or could be included in the existing line item for technology with specific intent language.</p> <p>(5) Some very small districts will not need their own FTE but still need some technology support.</p>
Cost	
Timeline	

Problem	Access to professional development
Justification	Employees need access to professional development. This is essential to build the staff we have and give them a support system which is a tool for retention.
Potential Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Use instructional leaders/coaches especially in high-need content areas (these could potentially be shared by districts). (2) Use Idaho Digital Learning Academy (IDLA) for professional development. (3) Encourage the State Department of Education to incentivize school districts that pool resources and work together to meet their needs. (4) Establish regional professional development opportunities combined with online professional development including ongoing continued support. (5) Work with the Colleges of Education to provide courses by extension and during teacher-friendly time periods, including evenings, weekends and during the summer months.
Potential Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (2) Districts need the connectivity and technical support. (2) IDLA needs time and funding to develop these professional development courses.

	(4) Need adequate substitute teachers to ensure that instruction continues while staff is receiving professional development.
Cost	IDLA needs funding to be able to develop and implement the online professional development. Funding for districts to pay substitute teachers to ensure that instruction continues while staff is receiving professional development.
Timeline	

YEAR TWO

Problem	Transportation costs
Justification	Currently, because of the funding cap, districts may be penalized without any realistic solution on how to operate their transportation more efficiently, and they are penalized if they provide service to students outside their district.
Potential Solution	(1) Forming a co-op to share expenses of rural busing. (2) Change the funding cap waiver to recognize student time on the bus and inter-district cooperation. (3) Sliding scale for rural areas.
Potential Obstacles	
Cost	
Timeline	This will be addressed in year two in order to further investigate and examine issues and potential solutions.

YEAR TWO

Problem	Cost of special education services and meeting the requirements of students Individuals Education Plans (IEPs)
Justification	Meeting a district's special education needs and address a student's IEP may not fulfill a full-time position, but it is difficult to hire the necessary certificated staff for part-time work. Often this forces districts to contract with expensive companies that can meet those needs.
Potential Solution	(1) Use a co-op so that multiple districts may combine their needs and hire staff accordingly.
Potential Obstacles	
Cost	
Timeline	This will be addressed in year two in order to further investigate and examine issues and potential solutions.

YEAR TWO

Problem	School facilities in rural Idaho need improvement
Justification	<p>Some school facilities in rural Idaho are in deplorable shape; therefore, the students attending those schools are not getting the same benefits as those in urban areas. This is a very important factor in trying to ensure that all students obtain a quality education in a safe and secure environment/facility.</p> <p>Poor school facilities also add to the challenge of attracting new teachers.</p> <p>Consolidation in rural areas is not an option in many of Idaho's remote and isolated districts.</p>
Potential Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Address bond capacity of Idaho's rural districts. (2) Address concerns relative to facility maintenance currently set aside.
Potential Obstacles	
Cost	
Timeline	This will be addressed in year two in order to further investigate and examine issues and potential solutions.

Idaho's Rural Education Initiative: A Report to the Idaho Legislature, January 2008

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